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U.S. to Spend \$50 Million To Build Honduras Facilities

Establishing Permanent Bases Disclaimed

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The Reagan administration, while saying it does not intend to establish permanent bases in Honduras, plans to build \$50 million worth of facilities there during the next five years, including ammunition warehouses, aircraft hangars, barracks, a club and a \$115,000 outdoor racquetball court.

The planned construction is outlined in an unclassified report presented to Congress on Monday. The report for the first time shows the administration's detailed and long-range plans to maintain a military presence in Honduras, where officials have always said they are conducting only temporary exercises.

Much of the construction would support U.S. Army intelligence-

gathering forces based in Honduras but aimed at neighboring Nicaragua and El Salvador, according to the document and knowledgeable sources. The administration wants \$1.6 million to support intelligence drones operating from close to the Nicaraguan border and \$5 million to support an Army aviation unit that tracks Salvadoran rebels on behalf of the U.S.-backed Salvadoran army.

The chairmen of two key House Appropriations subcommittees charged in a letter this week that at least some of the projects are improper and do not appear to be temporary, as the Defense Department has claimed. Rep. W.G. (Bill) Hefner (D-N.C.), chairman of the military construction subcommittee, and Rep. Joseph P. Addabbo (D-N.Y.), chairman of the defense subcommittee, told Deputy Defense Secretary William H. Taft IV in the letter that some of the construction plans violate funding guidelines established by Congress.

"They've got grand plans," one congressional aide said. "It gets away from the idea that this is all done during exercises for the good of the troops. These projects are needed to support 1,000 troops permanently assigned to Palmerola," an air base in Honduras.

But Taft, in a cover letter to the Feb. 3 report, said that the construction plans through 1991, which focus on the Palmerola air base, are not the same as those for a permanent base.

"We have no intention to establish such bases," he wrote. U.S. activities in Honduras, he added, "are temporary in nature and will continue to function for as long as the situation in the region requires and the Honduran government approves our presence."

A Pentagon spokesman, Marine Corps Maj. Fred Lash, added that troops are assigned to Honduras for only six months at a time.

"I'm not going to say it's fixed or permanent, because any day we left, these would all be turned over to the Hondurans," he said.

U.S. forces began exercising in Honduras in the summer of 1983, in what administration officials called a show of support for Honduras and an attempt to intimidate the leftist Sandinista government of neighboring Nicaragua. Since then, the Army has maintained a task force of 800 to 1,600 troops at Palmerola while rotating as many as 5,000 troops through the country in a series of exercises.

Some of the airstrips built by exercising U.S. troops are now used by Nicaraguan counterrevolutionary guerrillas, or contras, seeking to topple the Sandinistas, according to knowledgeable officials. In addition, U.S. forces, limited by Congress to 55 advisers in El Salvador, have used Honduras as a base to train Salvadoran troops and gather intelligence on Salvadoran rebels.

Now the administration has informed Congress that it would like to improve its facilities in Honduras, including:

- \$28 million to upgrade the Honduran air base at Palmerola, to be spent in fiscal years 1987 through 1990. The modernization would "significantly reduce maintenance requirements" at the base, the Pentagon said.

- Another \$1.6 million of "minor construction" projects, mostly at Palmerola, including \$65,000 for baseball and soccer fields, \$80,000 for sports facilities lighting, \$15,000 for a basketball court,

- \$125,000 to enlarge the dining hall, \$195,000 for showers and latrines, \$150,000 for a fire station, \$75,000 to upgrade local roads and \$370,000 for guard towers and other security measures.

- \$1.2 million for "prepositioning of bridging, barrier material [and] engineering equipment to reduce time and expense of airlift and sealift in support of military exercises." Congress earlier turned down a similar request to preposition materials to support tank operations at San Lorenzo in Honduras.

- \$1.6 million for a runway for the remotely piloted vehicles that have been operating from San Lorenzo. Officials said the intelligence drones have video cameras that can look down on Nicaragua or El Salvador.

- About \$2 million of construction work per year conducted as part of training exercises, mostly in remote areas. This year the construction will include an ammunition supply point, a warehouse for "secure storage," a helicopter loading apron and about 14 miles of dirt roads.